



Department of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

MAR 13 2001

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
601 West 1st Ave
Spokane, Washinton 99201

Re: Joint U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Air Force Environmental
Assessment of the Disposition of Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators
(DOE/EA-1351)

Dear Senator Murray:

This letter is provided to notify you that the Department of Energy (DOE) and United States Air Force (USAF) intend to act as co-leads in development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) that will analyze alternatives for disposition of ten (10) Strontium-90 (Sr-90) Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators (RTGs) from the Burnt Mountain Seismic Array Observatory in Alaska. This EA is being developed in consideration of the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (Public Law 91-190, 42 U.S.C., 4321-4347), Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) as amended, DOE implementing procedures set forth in 10 CFR 1021, and USAF procedures set forth in 32 CFR 989.

The USAF has decided to install alternative power sources in the Burnt Mountain Seismic Array Observatory in place of the 10 Sr-90 RTGs currently installed there (*Supplement to EA for Burnt Mountain Seismic Array Power Supply*, April 2000, 354 CES/CEVP, Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska). The use of RTGs in the Burnt Mountain Seismic Array is a unique application in the USAF that is being terminated. The USAF has confirmed that there is no need for the RTGs elsewhere in the USAF or elsewhere in the Department of Defense.

Under authority specified in the *Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Amendments Act of 1985* (Public Law 99-240), DOE conducts an ongoing program to accept excess and unwanted sealed sources, such as the RTGs, and stores them in a safe and secure manner, pending development of a licensed disposal site for such sealed sources. Accordingly, the USAF has proposed that the RTGs be removed from Alaska and transferred to DOE for disposition.

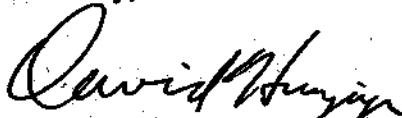
The EA will evaluate several alternatives for disposition of the RTGs. As required under NEPA, the EA will evaluate a "No Action" alternative – in this case leaving the RTGs at the Burnt Mountain Seismic Array Observatory. In addition, the EA will address two action alternatives, as follows: (1) transfer of the RTGs to DOE for storage pending reuse or recycling, and (2) transfer of the RTGs to DOE for storage pending disposal. For both the reuse/recycling and the storage pending disposal alternatives, the USAF would first transport the RTGs from their current locations in the Burnt Mountain Seismic Array Observatory to the air field at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. USAF aircraft would then transport the RTGs from Alaska to a USAF transshipment site located near a DOE storage site. Finally, the RTGs would be transferred, via ground transport, to the DOE site for storage pending either reuse/recycling or disposal.

The EA will address several pairs of DOE sites and USAF transshipment sites associated with those DOE sites. The DOE sites are alternative sites to be considered for storage pending reuse/recycling or long-term storage pending disposal. These sites were selected from among all the sites operated by DOE on the basis of their current involvement in management of low level radioactive waste, expectation that they will remain open through 2015, and their management by either the DOE Environmental Management program office or the DOE Albuquerque Operations Office to ensure effective institutional control and management. The USAF sites are alternative transshipment sites that will be considered for use in conjunction with the DOE sites they are paired with, due to their location near the DOE sites. A list of these pairs of alternative USAF transshipment sites and their associated DOE storage sites is enclosed.

In addition to the 10 RTGs from the USAF to be addressed in the EA, there are up to 40 additional RTGs from other sources that DOE might be asked to accept in the future. DOE is not aware at this time that organizations holding these additional RTGs have any specific plans to ask DOE to accept them. Nevertheless, to ensure that the EA addresses the maximum impacts that could result from DOE acceptance of RTGs, the EA will address the potential acceptance of a total of 50 RTGs, including 40 additional RTGs from sources other than the USAF. The alternatives to be analyzed for acceptance of the additional 40 RTGs will be the same as the alternatives for acceptance of the 10 USAF RTGs, except that the actual transportation routes that would be used for acceptance of these additional RTGs cannot be analyzed, since DOE does not know what they will be. Instead, the EA will analyze representative, bounding transportation routes to provide Government decision makers and the public with the best information possible regarding the impacts that might result from acceptance of the additional 40 RTGs by DOE.

We anticipate that the draft EA will be completed in the summer of 2001. Copies will be made available to the public for review and comment prior to finalization of the EA. Please direct any comments or questions about this EA, or requests for copies of the draft EA, to Mr. Robert A. Campbell, DOE, at (678) 585-9565 or robert.campbell@em.doe.gov, or to Mr. Steve Noe, USAF, at (321) 494-2837 or steve.noe@aftac.patrick.af.mil.

Sincerely,



David G. Huizenga
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Integration and Disposition
Environmental Management

Enclosure

**Alternative DOE Storage Sites
and
Associated USAF Transshipment Sites**

DOE Storage Sites Under Consideration	USAF Transshipment Bases Under Consideration
Hanford Site, Washington	Fairchild AFB, Washington
Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, Idaho	Mt. Home AFB, Idaho
Kansas City Plant, Missouri	Whiteman AFB, Missouri
Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico	Kirtland AFB, New Mexico
Nevada Test Site, Nevada	Nellis AFB, Nevada
Oak Ridge Reservation, Tennessee	Arnold AFB, Tennessee
Pantex Plant, Texas	Sheppard AFB, Texas Altus AFB, Oklahoma
Sandia National Laboratories, New Mexico	Kirtland AFB, New Mexico
Savannah River Site, South Carolina	Shaw AFB, South Carolina